

Dear Distinguished Members of the Environment Committee:

I am here today to **OPPOSE SB 1148 (Bear Hunting)** and **OPPOSE SB 1149 (Sunday Hunting)**

I am a member of CWRA, CT Votes for Animals and the CT Coalition to Protect Bears, but I speak here today on behalf of myself as an animal advocate and CT resident. I hold a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies and an MS in Environmental Biology. I am a licensed wildlife rehabilitator and I was a first responder when Bobbi the Bear was mercilessly gunned down in Newtown, CT. Bobbi is survived by two cubs Indra & Izzy. I was in the woods when DEEP threatened a cease and desist against our group for attempting to assist helpless babies, 11 & 13lbs.. Every step taken to help these cubs was a fight, but through intense public pressure, DEEP relented. Rather than upholding the law, the shooter of an AR15 at a bear in a neighborhood in close proximity to children, who violated local gun ordinances and tampered with evidence and was still not prosecuted. As a parent and an animal advocate, this disgusts me and I consider it a failure on both DEEPs and the State's Attorney's part.

The bills before us bastardize language to manipulate an unsuspecting public. This is an abuse of the public trust. "Nuisance wildlife" is a subjective term which provides a dangerous loophole in which animals lose. Our aspirations to truth & justice are undermined by a divergence from integrity in our words and our ongoing consideration of an acceptable level of animal mistreatment and killing for profit, hobby and sport. It's not "management" and "harvesting", it's "killing" by "shooting". Hunters claim they will service starving bears by killing them. Is that the same way they service starving does by killing 10 point bucks? Sorry I'm not buying it. Why, when the criteria for killing a bear is listed in three separate documents, must some make efforts to obscure it? To answer this question, follow the money. Senate Bill 1148 is corrupt. SB1149 would prevent my Sabbath prayer walks in the woods on Sundays, for fear of being shot, interfering with my religious practice.

The State must consider existing non-lethal resolutions such as removal of bird feeders during peak seasons, and protecting beehives, chicken and crops with electric barriers, rather than killing! I dare say, the notion of a group fighting so hostilely for the right to shed blood strikes me and my teen son as psychopathic and I don't think I'll ever understand why we entertain it. Nor will I understand how those who fight so vehemently for the right to kill hold so much influence with our State agencies and leaders. And then I remember...the money.

Hunting is a fear based response and before condoning it, the State must develop comprehensive education programs. DEEP's website correctly describes bears as timid and shy. Bears are in our midsts because they are starving, not because they're habituated. There was a low acorn yield and a tornado destroyed much of their limited habitat. They are desperate to provide for their families, just as we are. So they are attracted to our bait. The reason we fear bears is that they are large and we remain ignorant about them. They fear us because we are violent and aggressive. Our problem is humans, not bears. A trend I can't help but notice is the absence of human accountability when I read about human-bear interactions in the news. It's unlikely that a bear will attack without provocation, such as being antagonized, or snuck up on. Our provocation may be deliberate or by our ignorance, but we must be accountable for our part in what we have done to them and we must not exonerate ourselves when we behave violently, either directly or through our complicitness. Fifty bears? No, not one!

The CT Coalition to Protect Bears offers language and non-lethal resolutions, such as a feeding ban and community resolution grants for HB5160 that must replace that of SB1148 completely. DEEP must not allow orphan cubs to die in the woods when the public demands peaceful coexistence with bears and support for orphaned cubs. There are many communities that live harmoniously with bears, even when providing diversionary feeding stations. Bears prefer their own wild diet and will only visit these stations when necessary. There is no peace through superior firepower and the bears are unarmed. As the great Albert Schweitzer stated so eloquently, "The thinking man must oppose all cruel customs, no matter how deeply rooted in tradition and surrounded by a halo. When we have a choice, we must avoid bringing torment and injury into the life of another, even the lowliest creature; but to do so is to renounce our manhood and shoulder a guilt which nothing justifies."

-Dr. Regina Milano, Bethany, CT